



Exposure Investigation

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is responsible for assessing human exposure to hazardous substances and recommending measures to eliminate or reduce exposures that could be harmful to people.
- There may be insufficient data to evaluate exposures to chemicals from a hazardous waste site. By measuring the actual exposures, ATSDR can better characterize past, current, and possibly future environmental public health threats.

WHAT IS AN EXPOSURE INVESTIGATION?

ATSDR conducts Exposure Investigations (EIs) to find out if people have had recent contact with certain hazardous chemicals. ATSDR assists communities, state and local health departments, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by making public health decisions based on EI results. ATSDR can collect blood or urine samples along with samples of air, water, soil, or food. These sample results help ATSDR determine if people are, or have been, exposed to unusual levels of pollutants where they live, work, or play.

EIs are not research studies and do not usually characterize the exposure for the entire community. Individual participation in an EI is completely voluntary.

WHAT HAS ATSDR ACCOMPLISHED?

- A multi-disciplinary team of scientists has conducted more than 200 exposure investigations since 1995. The team specializes in environmental sampling, epidemiology, toxicology, and medicine. The EI team typically collects environmental or biological samples from community residents or locations with the highest exposure risk.
- Based on exposure investigation results, ATSDR has been able to give people who participate in the EI a better understanding of their exposure. ATSDR also makes recommendations for reducing environmental contamination, conducting further investigation or health studies, and providing community health education or health care provider education for certain health effects.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

ATSDR continues to investigate the public health impact of chemical exposures using biological and environmental sampling. ATSDR also seeks to expand the number of chemicals that can be assessed through biological monitoring.